



Legislature 2002

District 43 Report



State Representative
Frank Chopp

**Speaker
of the House**

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2002 Legislative Session began with dire predictions that it would be forced into overtime and eventually end with no solution on transportation, large tax increases, and few, if any, significant accomplishments. As it turned out, all of those predictions were wrong.

In the short span of 60 days, we broke through years of political gridlock on transportation, balanced the budget, and accomplished far more than anyone thought possible with the hurdles we had to overcome.

Our theme as House Democrats is "Working Together for One Washington". With our new majority in the House, we started this session with several main goals: expand economic security and opportunity, address the transportation crisis, promote a competitive business climate, and balance the state budget. We set a new direction and advanced a progressive agenda for the people of our state.

As always, it is an honor to serve as one of your representatives. In my position as Speaker of the House, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to serve the 43rd District and the entire state of Washington.

Frank Chopp
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Moving transportation forward

As promised, transportation gridlock in Olympia is over. With the Democrats' razor-thin majority in the House, we delivered on a regional approach to tackle congestion in the central Puget Sound area and a comprehensive statewide plan that will be on the November ballot to give voters the opportunity they wanted.

If approved by the voters, this \$7.7 billion statewide proposal will be a major step forward for safer roads, congestion relief, and Washington's economic vitality.

The plan will raise enough money over the next 10 years to invest \$6.1 billion in traffic congestion relief and safety improvements on our roadways and ferry system, \$1.2 billion for transportation choices such as buses, and \$330 million to improve local streets.

There's a specific statewide list of projects including Seattle and the greater Puget Sound area. For example, it earmarks more than \$1 billion for transit, buses, vanpools, and passenger ferries. And more than \$450 million has been allocated to start reconstruction of the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

The money to pay for these and other projects would come from a:

- 9 cent gas tax increase, (5 cents in 2003 and 4 more cents in 2004).
- 1% increase in sales tax on new and used motor vehicles.
- 30% increase in commercial truck weight fees, phased in over two years.

The total gas tax increase would cost the average driver approximately \$50.00 a year.



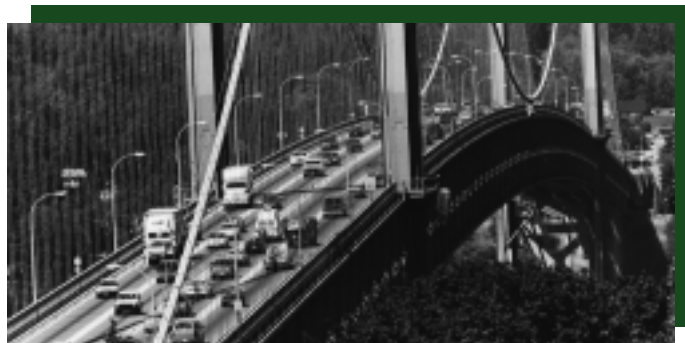
Creating new transportation solutions

Regional Transportation Package — To free commuters from the grips of Washington's most congested areas, the Legislature granted King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties new authority to place regional proposals on the ballot for their critical transportation improvements.

Monorail — Seattle voters will also get the chance to vote on local taxes to pay for a major component of an Elevated Transportation system. Supporters say it can be up and running in five years if voters give the project a green light to go.

Looking out for the public interest

Winning the battle for public financing to build a second Tacoma Narrows Bridge was an uphill battle, but anytime you can save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, it's a cause worth fighting for. The public financing will hold down costs with a much lower interest rate compared to private financing. Furthermore, we kept public control over our public roads.





Giving people a vote

During this session's legislative debate regarding our state's transportation problems and how to fix them, one of the most important issues was whether or not the package should be referred to the voters as a referendum. I think you deserve to know why I believed in placing this issue on the November ballot.

As the debate continued in Olympia it seemed to me that, one way or another, the statewide transportation plan was going to the voters. Had the Legislature enacted the taxes directly, a citizen petition drive would have put the plan and its tax increases on the November ballot anyway.

In January, I read the results of a statewide poll. One point stuck out clearly. 69% agreed with this statement: "I would not accept any increase in my taxes for transportation improvements, without having a chance to vote on that increase. Results of previous initiatives have made it very clear that voters believe no tax increases should be implemented without a vote of the people."

I strongly believe the way to move forward in transportation is by working with the people through a public vote, not trying to avoid them by the Legislature enacting a large tax increase.

In the fight for transportation improvements, which battlefield is better? Fighting against citizens furious that the Legislature and a political "elite" ignored the will of the people, or, putting it on the ballot for a positive, constructive consideration of a plan to improve roads, ferries, and public transit? We expect public votes to fund schools, and I believe it is appropriate to have a public vote on increased transportation funding.

I voted with the majority of the Legislature to pass this transportation referendum to the ballot because it has had a thorough review to make sure the projects are clearly necessary and of the highest priority; it includes steps to provide accountability to the public and establish safeguards for project completion on time and within budget; and, it represents a significant, balanced, and reasonable approach to addressing our transportation challenges.

These investments, the projects that directly benefit King County and the whole state, and their importance to Washington's economy are the reasons why I will be supporting this plan in November.

Balancing the budget

Facing the worst economy in at least 20 years — made much worse by the crippling effects of September 11 on our state's economy — we balanced the state's budget without raising general taxes for consumers or business. To fill the \$1.6 billion gap we had to cut nearly \$700 million in expenses, eliminate more than 900 state jobs, and carefully re-apportion available resources to protect basic education and vital human service programs that help our most vulnerable citizens.

Improving our public schools

To ensure safer schools, we passed an anti-bullying bill requiring each school district to adopt policies to prevent harassment, intimidation or bullying. Victims of bullying often experience serious harm.

To preserve and build on improvements made in Washington's public schools, we passed a budget that:

- Funded K-12 at 8.3% above previous 2-year level.
- Raised per-student spending by \$367.
- Funded Initiative-728 to reduce class-size and implement other K-12 learning improvements.
- Funded Initiative-732 giving teachers cost-of-living increases.
- Added money to cover increasing enrollments and other mandatory costs.

With a terribly tight budget, we did trim some funding for education. To offset this year's cut and to better ensure the continued improvement of our schools, we will work on long-term financing for next session.

Fostering economic vitality



Beyond the progress we made on transportation, probably the most important priority this session for our business climate, was reforming our Unemployment Insurance System. After nearly 20 years of inaction, we forged a compromise bill that will make the system more equitable and sustainable, saving businesses hundreds of millions of dollars that can otherwise be spent on new jobs, and expanding re-training benefits for workers laid off from declining industries.

Other major accomplishments to stimulate the economy included an Economic Stimulus Package of construction projects statewide, particularly for our community colleges and other important facilities. This new budget will help create jobs during our state's difficult economic times.

Helping working people

Improving economic security and opportunity for all citizens was another major agenda priority for House Democrats this session. Several important changes that will make it easier to balance work and family responsibilities were approved including:

- **Family leave** — Workers will now be able to use their sick leave to care not only for themselves and their children, but also for other loved ones—spouses, parents, and grandparents.
- **Unemployment benefits** — Domestic violence victims who must sometimes leave their jobs to protect themselves and escape abuse will now be provided a much-needed economic cushion to help them rebuild their lives.
- **Credit scoring** — A top priority for consumer groups, new limitations have been imposed on insurance companies to control the use of credit reports to determine who gets insurance and how much they will pay.

Reforming state government

- **Civil service reform** — This will make state government more efficient and easier to manage. It streamlines state job classifications and employment practices to reward performance and productivity, not just seniority. And it gives state employees a greater voice in their jobs and allows more services to be contracted out.
- **Drug-sentencing reform** — Supported by many in the law-enforcement, this will help break the cycle of addiction and save millions of tax dollars in future criminal justice costs. It focuses on drug treatment rather than excessive prison sentences for non-violent drug offenders. At the same time, it increases the penalties for selling drugs to children.

Working on unfinished business

Looking forward to next year's session, we'll continue the push on several issues that we were not able to get done this year.

For example, we'll continue working on prescription drug reforms to get a handle on the rising costs of health care and help consumers save money.

We'll also work to develop a plan for long term financing of our public schools particularly to implement Initiative 728 for smaller class sizes and other improvements, and Initiative 732 for cost of living increases for teachers and public school employees.

We did get a lot done this session, but there is always more that we can and will do in the future to better serve the people of this district and all of Washington.